

NEW INITIATIVES FOR DEVELOPING A MULTISKILLED AMC WORKFORCE

Introduction

To meet the challenges of the Army's transformation—particularly in view of the recent loss of significant numbers of talented and experienced personnel—the U.S. Army Materiel Command (AMC) urgently needs to maintain a highly knowledgeable and multiskilled workforce. AMC has responded to this challenge with multidimensional initiatives for developing and retaining a flexible workforce with the necessary expertise. These initiatives are designed to rejuvenate our human resources in the areas of acquisition, logistics, science, technology, and the skilled trades.

Workforce Challenges

AMC's workforce is still composed of skilled, experienced, and highly capable civilians who have dedicated their careers to the Army. However, during the last 12 years, base closures and infrastructure reductions have significantly reduced resources. Furthermore, by the year 2005, more than 53 percent of AMC's civilians will be eligible for retirement. The median employee age has increased to 49 years; in the trades and crafts area, 45 percent of workers are over age 50, well within reach of retirement.

These statistics highlight a workforce imbalance that began in FY89. Successive years of downsizing have reduced AMC's civilian strength to just over half its former size. A downsizing of this magnitude relied on

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reduction-in-force (RIF) procedures, which typically retain employees based on years of service. Also, AMC initiated a hiring freeze so that current employees could be placed in vacancies. Usually, the more senior employees were placed. This minimized the RIF impact significantly, but essentially cut off the pipeline of new and younger talent.

While AMC downsized, its mission requirements continued to change and its workforce skills did not keep pace. AMC's goal was to downsize in a humane manner by minimizing the adverse impact on employees rather than wholesale restructuring and reshaping. Despite these efforts, significant workforce imbalances resulted.

In 1998, AMC initiated Work Force 2010, an aggressive study that identified the command's past employment trends and future workforce needs, and developed strategies to balance them. The charter for the General Officer/Senior Executive Service Steering Committee stated that AMC must have "the work force and skill balance needed to meet our mission requirements." The study highlighted two primary courses of action to enable AMC to shape the future: legislative changes and training of the workforce.

Legislative changes were needed to deal with skill imbalances and to

attract new, high-quality employees. AMC has championed several such legislative changes that were adopted by Congress in the *National Defense Authorization Act for FY01*. One change allows repayment of student loans for new employees. This will be an excellent incentive for attracting recent college graduates to the federal workforce. The act also expands AMC's ability to pay civilian employee tuition for academic degrees, including advanced degrees. This incentive will also make federal employment more attractive.

Another change allows the use of Voluntary Separation Incentive Pay (VSIP) authority to provide a monetary incentive to eligible employees to retire without reducing the workforce. This restructuring VSIP is a useful tool to deal with skill imbalances and to ensure that AMC retains employees with the right skill mix for the future. Currently, AMC is urging HQDA to continue to seek legislation to allow hiring flexibility and compensation.

Training was the second course of action identified in the Work Force 2010 study. Revitalization efforts within all segments of AMC's workforce are strong, according to the study. However, AMC needs to accelerate its efforts to bring in new talent, new ideas, and new skills. AMC has several recruiting and training initiatives to accomplish these goals. A discussion of several of these initiatives follows.

Recruiting And Training

The Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP). This program is being used to hire apprentices through high school and post-secondary school cooperative education programs at Tobyhanna, Annis-ton, and Corpus Christi Army Depots. STEP helps foster relationships with state agencies as well as with local technical schools. Young students are provided an on-the-job training experience while completing their education. The goal of the program is for the students to obtain the skills and abilities necessary to move into the workforce with the potential of promotion to the journeyman level as mechanics, machinists, and welders. STEP effectively markets America's Army as an employer of choice.

AMC Apprentice Program. This program involves training a successor workforce in the trades and crafts areas at our depots. A skill assessment was conducted in critical areas such as ammunition, aircraft overhaul, and armament work; and a comprehensive training and orientation program was developed. The apprentices learn from the professionals and receive hands-on experience with the experts before they retire. The apprentices sign an agreement to remain with the federal government for 3 years after they receive 4 years of training. The apprentices also sign a mobility agreement so that AMC can place them where needed within the command after the training is completed. Congress provided \$3 million for this program in the *National Defense Authorization Act for FY01*. AMC is hiring 82 new apprentices. Some began training at six locations throughout the command in FY01.

AMC Fellows Program. This 5-year fellowship is targeted at the professional, management, and technically oriented occupations. Again, AMC assessed critical shortfalls and imbalances in our core competency areas of logistics power projection, acquisition excellence, and technology generation. Subsequently, a program was developed to train future AMC leaders who will be multiskilled

and multifunctional in two or more program areas. During the 5-year fellowship, employees move from entry-level to senior-level positions in a program that offers training in various functional specialties supporting AMC core competencies. Participants work toward an advanced academic degree while participating in rotational assignments in specific career fields at various levels in the command. AMC fellows will get Army field experience, leadership training, and core curriculum training in resource management, information technology, contracting, acquisition, and human resources. Approximately 50 fellows will start the inaugural program this year.

The Acquisition Career Experience (ACE) Program. This is a summer program that focuses on revitalizing the acquisition workforce. College students with business backgrounds are recruited on a cooperative basis during their final 2 years of college. The concept for the ACE Program was developed by the AMC Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff for Research, Development and Acquisition, and the U.S. Army Communications-Electronics Command Acquisition Center, along with the Headquarters AMC Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel. They established a partnership with the Acquisition Career Management Office, which reports to the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Acquisition, Logistics and Technology, who agreed to provide the seed money to start the program.

During its pilot year in summer 2000, the ACE Program was initially partnered with the Integrated Science and Technology Program (ISAT) at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, VA. The ISAT Program focuses on developing students with multifunctional and business training. Following a successful first summer, the ACE Program was expanded nationwide to schools in every region of the country. This summer, approximately 40 students are working cooperatively with mentors to learn about specific acquisition issues and challenges. Students who successfully complete the program will have the opportunity to noncompetitively

enter an intern program in one of the acquisition career fields or the AMC Fellows Program. (For more information on the ACE Program, see the article on Page 44 of this issue.)

The Career Related Experience in Science and Technology (CREST). This initiative focuses on recruiting undergraduate and graduate students who are pursuing an engineering and related science degree in an area in which the Army is recruiting. Like the ACE Program, CREST provides summer and/or part-time employment for a minimum of 640 hours per student. The training and experience qualify students for an appointment to a civilian engineer or scientist position in the Army Intern Program following completion of their degree. As of April 2001, the CREST Program has 83 active participants and has already contributed 59 recruits to the Army's Intern Program.

Conclusion

The initiatives discussed in this article are only the first steps in recruiting and maintaining a highly proficient AMC workforce. AMC's challenge is to create a continuous learning environment for employees in all career stages. In today's Army, new strategies must be created for all job categories and programs must be in place to continuously revitalize and balance the workforce. Clearly, the belief that learning is a life-long endeavor has never been more true for AMC than it is today. AMC realizes the challenge is great, but AMC's aggressive and organized efforts are equal to the task.

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